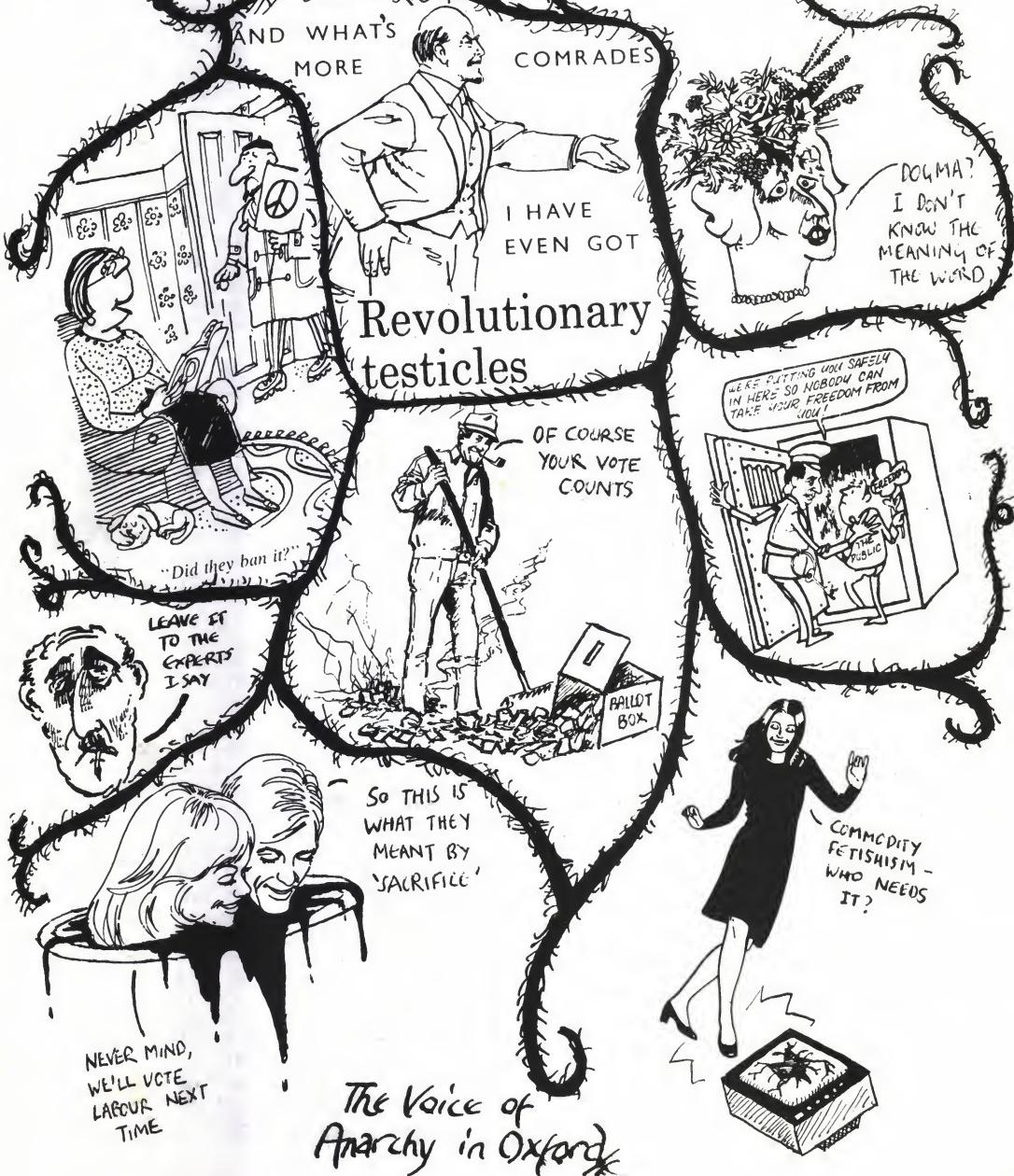


AUTONOME

MAY 1981

No. 9



Must we tolerate Christianity revisited ?

Many generations presumably have now read Bertrand Russell's, "Why I am not a Christian". In the old days when the aging imbecile still possessed credibility , the young who would provide the Oz generation in their middle-age, thought right on and adopted it as their badge,their totem if you like, their flag of convenience;it is true that Russell was backtracking then;it is undeniable that he moulded his attitudes around what he considered to be logical conclusions and passed them off as convictions;that is what an academic background does for one;there is something reptilian about Russell.

It is not an individual fault;there are any number of biologists,chemists, historians devil-worshippers,mother-goddess devotees,UFO watchers,Citizen Band radio enthusiasts (why are anarchists never called anarchy enthusiasts on the telly ?) all willing to plunder the tools and language of their disciplines to affirm or deny the existence of God,or A Great Spirit,or for the acid casualties an Exploding Plastic Inevitable.For a scientific explanation of the nature of the existence of God read Teilhard de Chardin. There you will learn that even atoms have souls,or another coexistent nature, or a whisper of immortality.To the impressionable this conjures up the mental image of spending an eternity in Paradise among those little polystyrene models that are to be found in school science labs.

For this reason,I am temperamentally unsuited to conduct an argument with anyone on the question of the existence of God,or the validity of the Christian concept of a God(No I do not believe I will be struck dead if I spell it with a little g as the wicked Communists do-in the interest of balance I shall henceforth write it 'god' and 'communists').However I shall stick to I instead of i-very Nietzschean.) on the grounds of scientific likelihood or philosophical probability.Russell went out one morning to buy a tin of tobacco for his terribly Oxford pipe, and suddenly thought to himself, 'The ontological argument for the existence of god is sound.'I would not trust such a person to perform an enema on me,let alone allow the honeyed blandishments of his 'brilliant' mind to jeopardise my immortal soul.

Therefore I will not counter Russell with an affirmation,entitled,"Why I am a Christian."The best argument against god,if the whole idea makes one thoroughly ill is to deny that there is anything to deny.Proudhon stated that he was not an atheist but an antiatheist since god served only to justify the existence of private property.(what a rilly neat attitude- such pity it's past(shit,ever tried an acute accent on a German typewriter?)).

For the rational agnostic,such as myself or the diehard antiatheist,the question of god and the question of Christianity or the existence of attitudes to christianity are completely separate.To blame Christianity for the Inquisition, the repression of women, and nuclear weapons is to give it a corporate existence in the same way as to credit with social and technological advance.This is only so if the term Christianity is only used in a normative sociological sense and treated as a constant down the centuries. Many Christians would like to do this and argue for a guiding hand.Most the original Pangloss,Voltaire fans.I think this is bullshit and that the converse argument vilifying everything tainted by Christianity is equally invalid, and involves people in an argument as sterile as the scientific or rational god-argument that I described earlier.

Frank entitled a piece in Autonome,Must we tolerate Christianity. I thought that that ,like much anti-Christian contemporary polemic,utilised the two threads of argument I have just disagreed with.It didn't answer its own question-are we to tolerate Christianity,only the question,are we to argue against it taken as a whole.Christians argue among themselves on questions of contraception,abortion and the question of compelling obedience to moral law, and who determines moral law.My anarchist credentials would be preserved in such an argument if anyone is looking for transgression of the party line.If anyone wants to create a bane of Christianity which must not be tolerated(by an Inquisition perhaps) I would argue that that is all very well for creating a jolly esprit de corps but might be dangerous,counter-productive even,if we were not sheltered by the extreme security and silliness of our surroundings.Try organising an anarchist task-force in Ulster, Yes ,comrades we must be tolerant of what we think of as silliness, but not of what we can see as direct nastiness..and we must love each other to allow the doctors to do their wonderful work of healing.

paul smith.

The day the Mad Monk came to Oxford

At 5p.m. on Thursday 7th May, Balliol Lecture Room 23 was packed with people intent on taking part in the crass event of the year - Sir Keith Joseph leading an academic seminar on Equality.

At 5.15 p.m. it was announced that the seminar had been moved to the Lecture Thatre in the Social Studies Faculty Centre as the Balliol Lecture Room was too small to accomodate the multitude. Suspicious, we thought. If the SSFC lecture theatre is any bigger than the Balloil one, then the difference in size is not sufficient to warrant a 5-10 minute walk down George Street, as well as the consequelt delay in beginning the seminar.

Never mind. We all arrived at the SSFC to find the Sheath happily seated, having avoided the unpleasantness of demonstrations outside Balliol (which didn't happen anyway).

The seminar began with the ludicrous plea from the chairman, Dr Wilfred Beckerman, that there should be no political speeches and that he wanted "calm, rational discussion" of the "conceptual problems" that might arise. And so Sir Keith launched into his political speech - an impassioned defence of his Tory government - accompanied by some gentle IMG foot-tapping at the back of the lecture theatre. Eventually the IMG decided to leave and made their way down to the front before launching into a vitriolic, angry, frustrated and very, very welcome tirade against Joseph (and against the audience - "shits" - for listening to him). The situation calmed a little when that contingent left, and the "calm, rational discussion" ~~xxgn~~ began. It soon became obvious that Joseph has the approximate mental capacity of an orang-utang and that the discussion would therefore be hampered, so several people, including myself, left the theatre.

Meanwhile, the masses had been gathering outside, and the lecture-theatre was invaded by 20-30 banner-waving, slogan-chanting interventionists. Sir Keith was unsure as to how to react. He seemed pleased at all this unexpected attention, and yet fearful that he might soon have the shit beaten out of him. The latter thought won out, and so

he beat a hasty retreat from the theatre. But where was he to go? There was no limousine outside the SSFC, no security guards to whip him to safety. So he had to walk all the way from the SSFC to Balliol with a baying, chanting crowd at his heels, looking more and more uncomfortable with each step he took. By now, les flics had arrived and they finally ushered the Mad Monk into the Balliol lodge. Now it was the turn of Chuck Taylor, Chichele Professor of Political Philosophy, to stand outside Balliol, foaming with anger, defending the right to speak (i.e. Joseph's) against the "fascist" activities of us "barbarians" who had lost the chance of confronting Joseph "at an academic level". I cannot understand why Taylor did not see after five minutes of the seminar that academic discussion with a nutcase like Joseph is out of the question - the man does not ~~want~~ invite rational discussion, does not deserve it, and is unmoved by it anyway. It is enough to show that he is unwelcome. He won't visit Oxford again in a hurry.

Postscript: "Industry Secretary Sir Keith Joseph was forced to cut short a meeting in Oxford after chanting demonstrators drowned his words. A group of placard-carrying supporters of the dead IRA hunger-striker and MP, Bobby Sands, broke up the seminar attended by 100 graduates in the social studies building in George Street last night. One of the organisers, economics don Dr Wilfred Beckerman, said Sir Keith was spat on by the demonstrators as he left the lecture room. Dr Beckerman said: "It was sickening. Universities are supposed to be places for rational discussion between people of opposing views." " (Oxford Mail 8.5.81)

Tout ça change

Andy Dobson.

OOOO

What is study for? One common approach is to distinguish two kinds of knowledge: "useful" and "useless". This is very dangerous. It's a distinction made with equal enthusiasm by leftists and by government technocrats. ("The economy needs certain skills so you've got to learn them!") "Put your knowledge at the service of the revolution" was always a pretty suspect slogan. Medicine (e.g.) sounds very "socially useful" - but in practice it's just a way into a glamorous world of "men in white coats". Just as I've no time for a vulgar feminism which suggests the world would be OK with the addition of a few "women in white coats", so a vulgar leftism which wants "revolutionaries in white coats" leaves me cold. In this case, the feminist effort to set up self-help health groups shows the way for the proper direction of knowledge. Practical knowledge is something you go and find out, not something you breed a race of experts for. Any pressure to make people study something "useful" reinforces the status quo: if you're trained to be a cog in the existing machine your "usefulness" is going to be pretty useless.

Bony Ten

VIOLENCE

At the recent meeting (the second) of the National Confederation of Anarchist Students in Brighton, to which four of us went from Oxford - there were comrades present from as far away as Bradford and even Glasgow, though under twenty in all - it was very striking how the one topic to provoke lively discussion was the old chestnut of non-violence. I always object to discussing this, because all the arguments seem so familiar. More important, it is always so unclear what the discussion is about.

Pacifism, by which I mean active opposition to all forms of militarism, I take to be uncontroversial. I don't know any anarchists who are not by this definition pacifists. The rejection of militarism is central to any libertarian, non-statist approach, and this is worth emphasising, since "pacifist" seems to have become a dirty word in some anarchist circles.

So non-violence is not just pacifism.

Apparently we are looking for some Absolute Moral Principle. I'm always a bit suspicious of Absolute Moral Principles, of trying to reduce right and wrong to a set of rules. Rules do away with moral thinking in making particular decisions - and so with individual responsibility for particular actions. It's just plain laziness and coping out to appeal to Absolute Principles. For instance. One such AMP which I have a lot of sympathy for is vegetarianism. But even here I'm not happy about being dogmatic; things just aren't simple, black and white. I'd agree that in the best of all possible worlds people wouldn't eat meat; for my part I'm happy to try to grow into the habit of eating a lot less meat. A closely related Principle would be opposition to abortion. Again, in the best of all possible worlds there would be no abortions; but now, as things are, the "woman's right to choose" is just more important. Life is like that! Anyway, in so far as non-violence is an AMP I'm against it.

Let's consider some ideas of what might be meant by violence. (These ideas are so varied it's little wonder discussions of the topic are usually so fruitless.)

May anarchists ever take up arms?

Are assassinations or bombings ever justified?

Should you ever compel anyone to do anything?

Should you defend yourself physically if attacked?

Should you resist arrest?

Should you ever get angry?

Discussion of the first three - roughly, "strategic" or "cold-blooded" violence - is generally at such a level of abstraction I have the greatest difficulty in taking it seriously. ("Suppose you were able to establish the perfect society by means of violence -" - that sort of thing.) I don't see how you can hope to answer such questions outside a particular situation. (Given an AMP of course you have no problem.) But it seems to me rather offensive to suggest (E.g.) that in what are surely among the most notable experiments in anarchist organisation, those in the Russian and Spanish Revolutions, those involved were simply "reducing themselves to the same level" as the various enemy armies determined to wipe them out, in establishing and defending themselves by force of arms.

As for terrorism, the objection seems to me that it is usually a waste of time, and based on a dubious ideology (provocation and escalation) and a hysterical outlook, and that it's a rather elitist form of struggle, rather than that it transgresses some Moral Law about the Sanctity of Life. It all depends. Some assassinations seem at least much less objectionable than others. Then, when your Angry Brigade bombs Carr's house it gives a measure of confidence to the rest of the movement. (Whether the Angry Brigade was 'non-violent' in that they attacked property but never people is another question: they were certainly terrorists.) As with any Moral Law (and as with any law whatsoever) I don't see where this gets its authority: who is in a position to legislate for any conceivable situation, to take at one arrogant swoop one moral decision for everybody else?

(cont.)

Violence cont.

Next the "tactical" or "hot-blooded" idea of violence (how you behave on demos, that sort of thing.) Here the question is: are we being offered a tactic of non-violence, or told to avoid hurting anybody, or to avoid aggressive confrontations, or to avoid feeling angry altogether. Anger seems to me a basic and even admirable emotion: what sort of radical can you be without feeling anger at the present state of things? Plainly you're not going to get much done in a state of blind rage, but no-one's recommending that. As for avoiding confrontation, just on principle, that seems wrong too. To be sure, there are those who look for confrontations just for emotional kicks; and this (as sometimes fails to get pointed out) is a complete waste of time. Exhibitions of machismo (or whatever you want to call it) are pitiful, clumsy, inefficient. But again, I don't see how a radical can avoid coming into confrontation with various ideas and the people who hold and uphold them. The only way to do that is to drop out into a complete quietism and just accept everything. (If the way you look or the way you think reduces Colonel X to a spluttering fury, who cares?) Surely I can applaud the Brixton rioters without either "glorifying in violence" or "reducing myself to the level" of the SPC?

Once you accept that confrontation is at some point inevitable, the attempt is to limit the form of the confrontation by stipulating that you mustn't hurt anybody. This seems a little arbitrary. It involves judging actions solely by their result, rather than by the intention (by whether anybody did in fact get hurt - of the Angry Brigade above), which can't be quite right. And when it comes down to it, it is not at all easy to decide what constitutes hurting somebody. (If Colonel X, in the middle of the phrase "ought to be horse-whipped" has an apoplectic fit and drops dead, haven't you, just by being there and opposing everything he stands for, in some way caused his death?! Or, does the mental anguish, loss of wealth etc suffered by the hapless Carr count as hurt? If not, why not? Etc)

Once again, it seems to me wrong to pre-judge all possible situations, to decide that it can never be right to resist force with force, or to kill, or whatever. (I am not laying down an alternative dogma, that e.g. in certain situations the anarchist is perfectly justified in killing people; just saying you can't take other people's decisions for them.) I would agree - who wouldn't - that unnecessary force should always be avoided; but what that means in a particular case will depend on the circumstances.

Non-violence as a tactic has a great deal to be said for it. I'm not quite sure what it is supposed to involve, but that is ignorance on my part. I can see the potential of say a sit-down strike, as opposed to conventional demonstrations; it is effective. And I would agree (agree that is with what I assume to be the analysis of the non-violence lobby) that, first, the problem with marches etc is largely one of self-discipline (apathy and desire for confrontation); and second, the moral force of sitting-down comes from the fact of non-violence, opposing the institutional violence of "the state" by solidarity alone. Such tactics warrant very serious consideration.

Still and all, a sit-down is only a symbolic form of action. What more lies behind the current catch-phrase "non-violent direct action"? I don't want to discuss this in any detail, partly because of my ignorance and partly because it doesn't seem controversial (everyone's in favour of direct action). But is not most of what is proposed as 'direct action', from occupations to sabotage, as much symbolic as a march or sit-down? Isn't much of it just a soft form of terrorism? "Yes but", the objection comes "what if enough people were involved...?" It is a very good objection. But could you not equally say "what if enough people were involved in riots like those in Brixton?"?

James Matthews



AN THEM.

The People's flag is deepest black,
Spattered with the blood of an OUCA hack.
In the wind so proud it flies,
A symbol of no compromise.

Centrists think they've won the day,
Think they've sent us on our way
Well chosen is their flag of pink
The colour gin they like to drink.
The authoritarian flag of red
Makes Reagan search beneath his bed,
Where he spies a copper pan
Containing Georgia's Ku Klux Klan.

The statists took our song away
What a mess it's in today
NEC voices -it's absurd
They don't know the proper words.

So raise our voices,sing we all
Of you and me and Goodman,Paul
Though Tories wince and Fabians sneer
We'll get the black flag flying here. MOSE HART.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT.

And now,Autonome presents a new and possibly never to be repeated feature.
Here we reproduce vignettes,tableaux vivants if you like,illustrating the everyday horror and oppression which the attitudes prejudices and fancies of our self-proclaimed masters entail.Why not make your own compilation,keep a scrapbook,it's fun to have all that gotesqueness and brutality at your fingertips.It's more satisfying than a gossip column.If you can't think of something, and try to think up the most outrageous things possible,you will come to realise the sheer impossibility of outdoing reality.

* It has been reported from Spain that the soldiers who stormed the Spanish Parliament with the Fascist lunatic Colonel Tejero have all been released from prison under an Easter Amnesty. Presumably if they tried it again next week they'd all be out under amnesty on the king's birthday.The main man is still in prison but has been allowed a constant stream of visitors who,according to the *Guardian*,have brought him gifts of cigars,chocolates and even a portable Television.From his cell the colonel has spoken movingly and at length for his concern about the decay of morality and the family in Spain and drug abuse among the young;he insists that it was this concern that prompted his action.* And it's dog eat dog time in Turkey where the military rulers have put another colonel,Alparslan Turkes,a former deputy prime minister and leader of the Nationalist Action Party,on trial,the indictment alleging that he ordered the killing of a trade unionist, and a police chief who had got in the way of right-wing death-squads.The Jeremy Thorpe of the Orient faces execution.

* The Snowball affair gathers more impetus.The deep throat involved in finger-ing the only two British soldiers to have been convicted of murder in Northern Ireland(to be set against 116 and rising civilian deaths at army hands),has now given details of the murder of dozens of civilians by the British Army in Aden twelve years ago.The Ministry of Defence has commented that they have no interest in the matter since those involved would no longer be "in service" and advised getting in contact with the civilian authorities.They would.

* Barry Prosser, a man in his 30's died in A Birmingham prison last year while on remand. He had a history of mental illness but was not aggressive.According to a fellow prisoner who gave evidence at the inquest,he was a happy man who sang in his cell.Again according to the prisoner, the prison officers took objec-tion to this singing and decided to calm him down.Also Prosser,though unaggressive and in a disturbed state was a very large man, and the officers are said to have seen his size as something of a challenge.The officers say they did no more than restrain Prosser while he was given a sedative.However the battered lump of flesh they left behind when they had all finished their fun, shows that one or more of them beat him up leaving bruises all over his body, and one delivered the kick which ruptured his stomach.

It is here that the law comes in; a crime has been committed, guilt must be established, punishment must be assigned and the cosmic balance restored. The delightful absurdity of crimes committed in prisons going unpunished vexes the police; they arrest a senior prison officer arguing he was most likely to have done it. Circumstantiality, which has filled prisons with people who were alone with one other person when the police think they were somewhere else, can not apply in this case and a magistrate refuses to allow the case to go before a jury. It is as though any one of the hundreds of prison officers in the prison has the capacity, the will and the opportunity to kill sadistically, for the pleasure of inflicting pain. The irony of such a level of criminality in a prison, which if reproduced in the outer world would reduce social living to the law of the jungle was not lost on Mrs Presser and her two small children who picketed the prison while Mr Jackson was triumphantly acquitted.

SEND YOUR ANECDOTES OF FUN AND THRILLS IN THE ARMED SERVICE OF THE STATE TO "HUMOUR IN UNIFORM" c/o AUTONOME. YOU COULD WIN A POLICEMAN.

OXFORD ANARCHIST CONFERENCE 1981 -- our latest communique

We have fixed some details for this our 2nd annual conference.

It will take place over the weekend of 20/21 June, from 10am - 6pm each day, at Ruskin College, Oxford (same place as last year).

We have had various suggestions for workshops, including:- Poland, Ireland, relations with/among the left, co-operatives, propaganda, the alternative press, sexual politics, students, nukes, direct action, violence/pacifism, etc etc. Please keep on sending your ideas! We'll try to duplicate any discussion papers sent to us.

There will be a social of some sort on the Saturday evening. Meet at the Nag's Head on the Friday evening.

Accommodation can be provided for all, but we'd be grateful if you could let us know beforehand roughly how many will want putting up and on which nights.

We'll ask a £1 "registration fee" of those who can afford it.

There will be creche facilities -- better than last year! And plenty of cheap food ad drink.

Contact address: Mike or James, 142, Walton St, Oxford. Tel Oxford 54388.

Oxford Anarchist Group

Anarchists field strong side in world Cup bid.

Despite strong opposition from Parliamentary United and Trotsky Hotspur, "the Blacks" have shown ~~extra~~ impressive form this season - notably the mid-season success in Spain and more recently the away win in Zurich. This is not to deny that there are some difficult fixtures ahead. The Fascists' mid-season bid for the European and World titles was finally defeated in Franco's dramatic sending-off and the Anarchists' last-minute goal, but while the neo-Nazis should never be underestimated, (a tenacious and very physical side), Parliamentary United - with new manager Friedman and the emergence of Thatcher and Reagan on the right - look likely to retain the cup for another season, unless, that is, the Anarchs' determination and drive see them through to the title. This, however, will require greater accuracy, better finishing and more willingness to take on the opposition in their own half. Maybe a return to the 5-3-2 formation heralds such a change.

THE TEAM. In goal: Leo Tolstoy; never the most aggressive of players; a cool head and an ability passively to resist onslaught by the opposition make Leo the suitable choice.

Comprising a solid defence we have, at left back, the veteran Kropotkin, (one is reminded of the resilience of Mick Mills and Phil Thompson); not afraid to commit himself to a challenge and a good passer of the ball to create moves from the back; and "Hawker" Proudhon, a controversial player who has obtained his place in the side through dogged determination.

Moving to the midfield: at right half we have the youngster Berkman, whose partnership with Goldman, at left half, has been a source of interesting play. Emma is the only woman in a male-dominated team, but hopefully we will be seeing many of the talented young women in the youth side filtering through in the next few years.

At the heart of the side, at centre-half is the tactician and organiser Malatesta. Errico, always the players' player is a popular lad both on and off the field. Widely tipped as the man to hoist the cup.

On the wings are recent signings from France and Spain. Ravachol on the left loves to take on defenders and his penetrating lobs into the box cause the opponents' defence all sorts of problems. On the other flank, Durrutti's tireless energy and aggressive runs are just as effective.

The two inside forwards are an enigmatic pair. Young Emile Henry, one could say an explosive inside right, rarely misses the mark, though his enthusiasm, indeed recklessness in attack, often results in bookings and sendings-offs. Inside left, Stirner, by way of contrast, is an erratic player. Occasional flashes of brilliant individual skill make him a must, but there is normally the irritating tendency to hog the ball which makes him unpopular with the crowds.

Finally, what libertarian eleven would be complete without ace-striker Bakunin at centre forward? The supporters' idol, he caused many problems for the Tsarists and the Marxists at the beginning of the season, scoring against the former and forcing an own goal from defender Lenin in the game against the latter. Mike's penetration into the box, his blistering shooting ability, and sheer enthusiasm for the game ensure that he's always in the heart of the action and is the side's leading goalscorer.

All in all an impressive side. Invincible? Some say so, but that remains to be seen.

AUTONOMIE is the organ of the provisional wing of the student section of the Oxford Anarchist Group. It is registered at Her Majesty's Patent Office as a dog-food. Theft of any or all of this publication is a serious offence against property to counter which the Government is considering introducing a levy on blank toilet paper, proceeds to go to various charities for retired anarchists and their pets. In the meantime there exists the ~~leg~~ common law remedy of mutilation.

The views herein contained are those of individual contributors and do not represent, or even necessarily reflect any group opinion or standpoint. The argumentative, the infuriated, the curious and the misunderstood, in fact anyone at all can contact the Oxford Anarchist Group c/o

A ghost is haunting the groves - the ghost of rationality. I want to argue rationally that rationality is dead. For five thousand years and upwards we have laboured under the supposition that the secrets of the universe are available to the rational mind. The resulting headlong intellectual stampede has led us into cul-de-sacs where we stand before the wall and throw up our hands in despair at "unanswerable" problems.

Consider the following as typical:

- how to infer the shape of your nose from your gene structure?
- how to reconcile human freedom with historical necessity?
- how to decide whether to kill your own child in order to save one million anonymous human beings?
- how to reconcile moral relativity with the need for political action?
- how to reconcile the isolated experiences which are human beings with the necessity of social life?
- how to wrap your brain around the idea that light is both waves and particles simultaneously?
- genes "jumping" from place to place in the DNA structure without mechanical explanation?
- electrons "jumping" from orbit to orbit around an atom without traversing the space in between?
- how can a table be both solid and yet "full" of empty space?

It is important to note that these are not the types of problems which are usually held to defy rational explanation - such as poltergeists or people suddenly bursting into flames - but problems which either we encounter in everyday life, or which have arisen ariscon after the due processes of rational thought have left us floundering.

It is now over half a century since physics - that paradigm of causality and rationality - was blown apart. In the nineteenth century, the legacy left by Newton was

reaping spectacular rewards in terms of the theoretical synthesis of phenomena. Electricity merged with magnetism, then electro-magnetism was found to account for light, colour and radiant heat. The control of the body was reduced to electro-chemical processes and heat, light, motion and flux were seen to be merely different forms of "energy". But just as the road towards "on ness" seemed to be within reach, physics as causality and rationality fell apart under its own contradictions. The deeper that physicists explored the nature of the simple atomic model of Rutherford and Bohr, the more its inadequacy was revealed.

First, Werner Heisenberg announced his shattering principle of uncertainty, according to which particles do not have definite locations and velocities - the more accurately we define the location of a particle, the more uncertain its velocity becomes and vice versa. The clearly-defined, linear trajectories predicted by Rutherford and Bohr become wide, blurred tracks - ON PRINCIPLE we cannot know where the particle is: it is everywhere at the same time. In fact, it is no longer even a particle - it is, as De Broglie said "at once both a corpuscle and a wave". And this "Principle of Complementarity" is the ~~xxxxxx~~ central point. Heisenberg described it thus: "The concept of complementarity is meant to describe a situation in which we can look at one and the same thing through two different frames of reference. These two frames mutually exclude each other, yet they also complement one another, and only the juxtaposition of contradictory ~~complementary~~ frames provides an exhaustive view of the appearances of the phenomenon". In other words, sub-atomic particles exhibit behaviour which can only be explained in terms which offend our commonsense notions of rationality and exclusivity. However, even though physics itself has shown that inclusive, all-embracing explanations of phenomena are on principle beyond us, physicists continue to seek that elusive pot of gold - the unified field theory, under which all forces in the universe would be theoretically united. Moreover, the tool they propose to use to perform this feat is the same that provided such success for Newton but which ultimately reveals flaws in the tool tool itself - rationality; or more particularly, rationality providing for a unificatory theory. Maybe the whole approach is flawed.

There seems to be no doubt that random processes play a significant role in the universe and that they have not had the attention they deserve, but there is one other striking example of where randomness has invaded a traditionally deterministic domain - Darwinian natural selection. Darwin constructed his theory in two parts, allowing chance to prevail in the first, with determinism taking over in the second. First, Darwin held that populations must develop a large amount of heritable variation for directional natural selection to work on. Darwin allowed that this variation is random and, we now understand, occurs via mutation when chromosomes split, and also via the unpredictable "jumping" of genes within DNA strands.

Now it is plain that when natural selection operates in the usual way, genetic variation is reduced as the fit arise, in part, by the elimination of the unfit. Again, there will always be variations as mutation occur even while natural selection is in operation. Yet studies of genetic variation in stable populations show there is just too much genetic variation to justify the claim that all genes are scrutinised by natural selection. This leaves the possibility of "neutral" genes which natural selection cannot "see", whose increase or decrease would then

depend on chance alone. Since "change of gene frequencies in populations" is the credo of evolution, randomness has crossed the border between the first and second parts of Darwin's theory and asserted itself as an agent of evolutionary change.. Stephen Gould, biologist, writes: "Perhaps randomness is not merely an adequate description of complex causes that we cannot specify. Perhaps the world really works this way, XXX and many happenings are uncaused in any conventional sense of the word. Perhaps our gut feeling that it cannot be so reflects only our hope and prejudices, our desperate striving to make sense of a complex and confusing world, and not the ways of nature". Wow.

There is nothing new in these sentiments. The wayward Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer, who committed suicide in 1926, proposed that coexistent with causality there is an acausal principle at work in the universe and that we cannot know how this principle functions because it functions outside the known laws of physics. Then Wolfgang Pauli (who predicted the existence of the neutrino in 1930 - 26 years before it was actually "discovered") took up the cudgel and attempted to extend the principle of non-caused events from microphysics to macrophysics. To this end, he collaborated with the psychologist Carl Jung in writing "Synchronicity - an Acausal Connecting Principle". The strength of the book lies more in the symbolic partnership than it wrote it rather than in what it actually says, for it is an obscure and unbalanced work. Its essential weakness seems to lie in the recourse to causal explanations of an a-causal principle. To this extent, Jung and Pauli, and you and I, are trapped in the categories and aspirations set by Greek philosophy over 2,000 years ago. Why do we assume that the Greeks asked all the right questions and what we have to do is answer them?

None of this is intended as a wholesale attack on rationality and/or causality. After all, it is still possible to win snooker world championships without making allowance for curved tables. The point is that rationality has a part to play, but it cannot tell the whole story. Rather than a-causality is a universal principle and to the extent that rationality is all about causal sequences, rationality cannot hope to provide universal understanding. It is significant that Pauli still sought elegant unification, despite recognising a principle of a-causality: "ince the discovery of the elementary quantum, physics was obliged to renounce its proud claim to be able to

continued

understand in principle the whole of the world. But this predicament may contain the seed of future developments which will correct the previous one-sided orientation and move towards a unitary world-view in which science is only a part of the whole". It seems to me that the search for unity is the paradigm instance of a rational approach, and if irrationality is a fundamental feature of the universe, then the search is doomed to failure.

The problems in all this are enormous. What is the function of irrationality? What does it mean to think irrationally? What is the status of an "irrational" answer? Where is the nearest lunatic asylum? But never mind. I feel a warm blast blowing through the causal tenements...

Andy Dobson

P.S. I haven't a clue what this has to do with anarchism.

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LETTERS PAGE (Yep - somebody wrote to us)

From Graham Short, Plymouth.

Dear Comrades, If I may start with your obvious awareness of being students. Our group is working-class, but none of us are inverted snobs about middle-class students. Attitudes depend on the opinions of those one comes into contact with. Prejudice is born of authoritarianism. Unfortunately students in general have generated their own mockery as white racism breeds black racism. Even anarchist students in the past, such as those who created the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists, were so wrapped up in the Marxist and Social Democratic ideas of the class struggle that we working class were left with the four lettered analysis - CRAP. Some "anarchist" students today still ask us to define class. Of course class is rubbish - but it exists and needs to be abolished! Anyway, I shan't be giving a modern class-analysis, but go into what you obviously feel, that is being hung-up about being middle-class students, which is, to my mind, nothing to be ashamed of. Nobody can help what they are as long as they are trying to change it! Kropotkin was an aristocrat but he didn't get hung-up about it. Instead he used his privileged way of life and education to change, or try to assist in the changing of society using his knowledge of science and language to express the opinions of the oppressed - thus giving anarchism respect and credibility. On the other hand, your group seems hell-bent on doing things which will get you thrown out of university. Why can't you do what you are obviously best at: You are academics at the most respected university in Britain - what you learn can be useful to the struggle. Of course, if you do not want to learn, that is up to you - you are entitled to drop out but a worker cannot drop out except to the DSS level. I honestly fail to understand why you cannot empathise with other struggles - surely this is necessary in order for

(cont.)

(The break in mid-line is because I had to re-type the page.

The Typist)

you not to become complacent and disillusioned. You will come up against bigotry and prejudice which I do, but that bigotry and prejudice was born out of parliamentary propaganda established by your predecessors in the late nineteenth century. The socialists who had no respect for my class and who failed to empathise - only sympathise - thus was born representation in our name but not spirit. Everything in the academic world is geared to establishment politics, and I would assume that it is your job as anarchists to change that, then it may become easier for us propagandists at a lower level. All too often, people think they have defeated my argument because of the dictionary definition of Anarchy. I can feel the exasperation on Andy Dobson's face while reading this, as it appears I am offering his very argument. This is not the case, case, although it may seem this way. Andy's metaphors about the availability of education are OK, but lack the definitions of education as we know it against the future of education with anarchy. All the period '30's soap operas on the telly show the growth of an "intelligent" working-class lad whose parents keep prompting him to get an "education" and all hope for the future rests with this to no avail. This is still the working-class attitude today.

NB Graham's letter was sent in response to the articles on Anarchism: the students' role, collected in the last issue of Autonome.

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A Suggestion:-

This Autonome is mainly the work of 3 people and is (let's be honest) for that reason bound to be rather limited in outlook. It could plainly do with a greater variety of material. There are surely any number of anarchists and libertarians around Oxford who are for whatever reason not involved with either of the "official" groups. To some extent the Friday night social provides a focus. But why shouldn't Autonome, or something better to replace it, help bring some greater degree of contact between us all? This may sound arrogant (why should anyone else want to have anything to do with us?), but isn't meant to be. Anyway, we'd welcome any approaches or suggestions.

James

OXFORD ANARCHIST GROUP AUTONOME EDITORIAL TEAM

About us: Autonome is the organ of the Oxford Anarchist Group. Its purpose is to promote discussion - and action! All views expressed are those of individual contributors, and not necessarily of anybody else. Any feedback, from anyone, is most welcome, whether in meetings or written articles.

The OAG can be contacted c/o EOA Books, 34 Cowley Road, Oxford. The Oxford Libertarian Group (the old town group) meets on Mondays in various places. We are the student group (anyone's welcome) and meet at 8pm on Sundays in term, currently in Trinity 3,2. Everyone comes to the Nag's Head, Nythe Bridge St, on Friday nights. The fabled picnics on Sunday afternoons in the Parks are always liable to happen.

OXFORD ANARCHIST GROUP AUTONOME EDITORIAL TEAM